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# Unusual Careers

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## UNUSUAL CAREERS

**ELLIS MOUNT, Editor**

More and more attention has been given in recent years to the number of careers which have been chosen, or developed, by people who had been trained in traditional programs for librarians. These careers often have been developed as a result of new technological advances; in other cases they have been created by the ingenuity of the people holding these positions. This article consists of a few examples of these non-traditional careers for people educated, or at least informally trained, in the work generally thought of as traditional positions for librarians who have then found employment in these non-traditional careers. The ones included here all had some relation to the fields of science and/or engineering. For other examples, a book published by the Special Libraries Association may be of interest. (1)

The following descriptions were written by volunteers, who collectively represent several of the non-traditional careers available to those who have used their training in librarianship and information science. It may open the eyes of those in "traditional" library positions who are contemplating other careers.

The accounts have been arbitrarily divided into two groups--those who are more or less their own boss, and those having jobs in which they have supervisors.

### I. ENTREPRENEURS

#### **FREE-LANCE CONSULTANT FOR SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT BY GAIL THORNBURG**

I am one of an increasing number of persons equipped with LIS training who have moved into non-library work. I received an MLS from Kent State, then went on to complete a Ph.D. in Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois in 1987. When I had finished my doctorate, I went on to become an Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland. There I taught the usual cataloging, library automation, plus a doctoral seminar in knowledge representation. Because of my marriage, I

wound up resigning from Maryland and moving again.

This led me to look at other work outside traditional library schools. I did some independent short term consulting and proposal development, and took the time for a course in C. I found my first long term consulting position working on an ISDN implementation project at NCR. This sparked my interest in networking. I worked there for a year, followed by other consulting projects in information management for litigation support database, and other work.

the intense climate of a software company working hard to meet a deadline for a new product release -- many nights, many weekends.

Then Frontier Engineering called. My first project with them involved a feasibility study on porting a FoxBase DBMS application to a Sun UNIX platform. Once I'd finished this project, someone wondered aloud if I'd happen to be interested in the RFP & Source Selection Project at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. Was I? This intrigued me from the point of view of electronic publishing, and the promise of further database work, as well as learning Windows development. Because I'd worked, prior to getting my MLS, as a government contract negotiator, I recognized the importance and high visibility of the prototype.

I was Project leader on this prototype for over four years. By the time I left, we had not only developed the means for publishing complete RFPs [potentially thousands of pages], but seen them deployed in other locations. I also had the responsibility for a CD Server offering virtual library access to government specs and standards, available on a LAN and inter-LAN basis. This was the base's first such networked CD Server environment.

In the last 18 months I was there, we decided to start developing software for source selection teams using Lotus Notes. So I wound up recognizing that this was the band wagon of the moment. In addition, this involvement opened the door for me to pursue my interest in networking. Hey, someone had to get those systems talking to each other! I wound up in charge of a multiplatform, multidomain Notes server environment

running on OS/2, Windows NT, and OS/2 SMP. This came along with all the related network responsibilities, setting up an SMTP gateway, Novell administration tasks, etc., that one could possibly desire. The hours were long and pressure was intense, but it was a great experience.

My current project at OCLC appeared to offer the prospect for interesting problems, and perhaps more research and publishing down the road. It seemed only logical to go for it. While it meant turning my back on a very marketable Lotus Notes certification, I think it's important for an LIS professional to remember that one is more than any specialized tool skills.

What have I learned from all this? Value your team mates. Nothing is more important than a good team for the success of a project. Expect to work hard, count it as a privilege to work long hours if you're learning new skills, and expect to need to learn new languages or network skills all the time. At the same time, don't let that intensive involvement blind you to the need to take a higher level view. Interestingly, despite my technical skills, the last three jobs I've taken were purportedly because of my LIS background. Sure, it's important to be authoritative in one's areas of responsibility. The users, I've learned, are a very real source of satisfaction, so don't ignore the satisfaction of helping others build their competency.

**Gail Thornburg**

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## METAMORPHOSIS OF A METALLURGIST INTO AN INFORMATION SCIENTIST AND AN ENTREPRENEUR

BY DONALD T. HAWKINS

My training for working in the sci/tech information business was unusual: I didn't have any **formal** library training! Although my entire 25-year professional career has been spent in the electronic information business, my formal training was as a chemist (with a BS degree) and a metallurgist (with MS and Ph.D. degrees). I am often asked how a person with advanced technical training in chemicals, metals, and alloys came to be in the electronic information business. The quick and facetious answer is, "Through the back door!" Seriously, I was extremely fortunate to join Bell Laboratories, a world famous research laboratory, as a Member of Technical Staff after completing my graduate studies in 1971.

At that time, the management of the Bell Laboratories Library Network felt that if their Information Scientists had Ph.D. degrees, they would be perceived by the technical staff as fellow researchers. Thus, they would be better able to interact with them on an advanced level and would better understand the technical issues stimulating their information requests. This policy had proved to be very successful, but it has generally been abandoned today.

I joined two Information Scientists who conducted literature searches and compiled bibliographies on demand for Bell Laboratories' technical and management employees. I was able to apply my technical knowledge to

information retrieval problems, but because of the breadth of technical interests of the Bell Laboratories research staff, I soon found myself involved in searches well removed from the subject of my training.

Of course, technical subject training alone does not make a successful library professional. Recognizing this, the orientation program for the new Information Scientist at Bell Laboratories called for a series of visits to various support units of the Library Network. Part of this program involved the Information Scientists frequently providing traditional reference services on a backup basis, as well as a one-week "internship" at the reference desk.

When online searching emerged in 1972, it was obvious that the Information Scientists should investigate and coordinate this new service. I immediately began learning about the databases and the technology of the systems, and my colleagues and I developed what became a full-fledged online information service operation. Some of the contacts I made during those years were valuable when I moved to other information-related projects in AT&T's business units, and they are still valuable today as I begin offering consulting services to the industry.

After retiring from AT&T in June, 1996, I formed an entrepreneurial consulting venture, InfoResources Corporation, which offers services to

database producers and other companies in the electronic information business. The major areas on which I consult are information sources and the use of the Internet for information retrieval, database marketing, and training. The experience I gained using online systems, performing searches as an intermediary for end users, and promoting AT&T's Information Retrieval Service has given me an excellent foundation in the areas of training, database design, indexing, and the user interface. Because of my many years as a user of online services, I am able to bring that viewpoint to my consulting activities. So far, I have been involved in testing new products and services and in helping emerging companies with their product

introductions. I have also worked on indexing projects and have consulted on the user interface to online systems. I have enjoyed preparing many professional papers, based on my experiences.

With the emergence of the Internet and World Wide Web, the electronic information industry has entered a new phase. Today's environment is a far cry from that at the beginning of the industry, but it is no less interesting and exciting. I remain optimistic and enthusiastic about the future.

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## II. EMPLOYEES

### GOVERNMENT MANAGER OF COPYRIGHTS AND DATA SETS BY TIMOTHY EDWARDS

I received an MSLS from Catholic University of America after abandoning my original plan to earn a PhD and teach at the college level. Before going to library school I had already received a B.A, M.Div., and an M.A. So educationally I had spent quite a big of time preparing for my career.

After several miscellaneous jobs I was hired by the National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC). Part of my duties consists of trying to set up blanket copyright agreements with periodical publishers. What makes the job complicated is arriving at prices for photographs to be used in electronic publications. This is more or less virgin territory since the publications themselves do not have much in the way of precedents on how to arrive at pricing such materials. In addition I must ensure that NGIC complies with existing copyright laws in negotiating blanket copyright agreements.

My other duties involve soliciting price quotes for sets of data to be used in developing databases. Often these databases are funded several years out, and are world wide/multi-subject in scope. Such work requires setting up discussion with outside information providers in order to educate them concerning NGIC procedures and goals.

Of course this requires that I have a good corporate knowledge and be familiar with automation capabilities as well as those of the providers.

Another aspect of my job is to write documents that present the needs of NGIC for funding or project initiation. This involves an ability to convince an unknown official in some distant location of our local needs.

Needless to say, I am dealing with non-book data constantly, all involving sci-tech subjects, and all a far cry from traditional publications. Even though my job description involves such things as Collection Development, Acquisition, Customer Service, and Bibliographic Instruction, in actuality I must depend on ingenuity to accomplish my daily duties.

To succeed in this job requires an ability to recognize the need for taking divergent paths in accomplishing the goals of particular projects. Relying on past methods or techniques would never bring success in many of my daily tasks. I must be able to assess the legality of the means of accomplishing what I'm working on, regardless of whether I had ever used that particular procedure or method before. In other words, flexibility is one absolute requirement for this job.

Another aspect of my work is that reorganization of duties and titles seems to go on constantly. In six years I've had four different titles and organizational

locations. I've learned to take such changes in stride. I've learned to deal with the different supervisory philosophies and evolving customer expectation in stride and to convince both in turn that when I look good, they look good, and when my customer looks good, I look good.

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### **MANAGER OF CONTENT LICENSING FOR AN INTERNET-BASED AUTOMATED RESEARCH SERVICE BY SARAH WARNER**

I am manager of content licensing at Amulet, Inc., an Internet-based automated research service company in Acton, Massachusetts. I am very involved with InfoWizard (TM), the Amulet's flagship product, which is a whole new way of getting product and business information. Little did I know, when I began my professional library career in the tradition of Dewey and Ranganathan, that many years later I would use my cataloging skills in a thriving new company in the online information industry.

I have a BA from Adelphi University and a Masters in Library and Information Science from Pratt University. I started out as an assistant serials cataloger responsible for cataloging of engineering and computer-related English and foreign language serials at the Engineering Societies Library in New York City. After several years in cataloging, I joined the ESL reference staff as a research librarian working with professional engineers, who were looking for information in such fields as civil,

environmental, mechanical and electrical information. I later joined Parson Brinckerhoff Quade and Douglas, a major international architectural/ engineering consulting firm as library manager. Again my focus was on international engineering and architectural and some business information sources. During these years I began to be very active in the Special Libraries Association.

The next step in my career brought me to New England and Wang Laboratories Inc. As corporate librarian, I directed and provided in-depth research and reference services, which included evaluating, acquiring, and making accessible a variety of information and tools with an emphasis on dial-up research and compact disk technology. I expanded my understanding of information technology and business information research content sources. While I was at Wang, we implemented various automation projects, including an integrated online catalog. In addition, I worked closely with the computer

industry analyst community to provide Wang with competitive intelligence.

In all three libraries, I acquired knowledge of which content sources were of most value within the information scientific and technology community. At Wang the information research tools included a collection of over 300 specialty computer and engineering titles. Among these titles were all of the IEEE and ACM titles. The collection also included product and company data on CD-ROM such as Disclosure, Computer Select, and UMI PROQUEST. Many hours were spent defining search strategies, learning new search techniques and executing searches using Knight Ridder's Dialog Information Service. Knowledge of the premium content providers such as the Yankee Group, International Data Corporation and Forrester Research proved valuable.

Then I moved to Amulet, Inc., where I became Manager of Content Licensing for this Internet-based automated research service company. My primary responsibility is to research, identify, evaluate, recommend, and license new content for InfoWizard(TM). It is the first agent-based personal research service designed for people who evaluate, buy, market, sell, or support information technology. Its reports, at a very low cost, help business professionals make better informed decisions. I am using my understanding of business and information technology content sources and experience working with the computer industry consultants. Amulet particularly sought me out for my expertise as a professional searcher. There are others with an MLS on our

team who perform other critical activities.

Our understanding of the sometimes arcane and costly research retrieval process has been very valuable when working hand-in-hand with the Amulet engineers to correctly simulate the "Reference Interview" and automate the research process. It also helps them identify new business opportunities while keeping a close watch on customers and competitors. Amulet licenses and redistributes content from periodical publishers, business news providers, newsletters and business publishers. We have licensed content from authoritative sources, all of which were very critical to research at Wang. These sources include CMP Media, COMTEX, CorpTech Computer Review, Faulkner Information Services, Information Access Company, Information Sources, International Computer Programs, Newsbytes News Network, PR NewsWire, and Reuters. Amulet's InfoWizard is a revolutionary, Internet-based automated research service.

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## **INFORMATION SPECIALIST IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING FIRM LARA WIGGERT**

When I made the decision to earn my Master's in Library and Information Science, I had just left my second position as a research assistant in a biomedical laboratory. I was one of those individuals with many interests who was having a difficult time deciding on a career path. After having earned a B.S. in Biology and completing two years of graduate work in Nutrition and Food Science, I had changed my mind about wanting to pursue research on a professional level. However, as unsatisfying as it was for me, lab work seemed to be my best option for employment at the time, given my educational background.

When I learned that my younger sister had decided to pursue a library science degree, my options seemed to open up. Here was a chance to combine my love of books and learning with my interest and training in the natural sciences. Why hadn't it occurred to me before? I'd never given much thought to what kind of education and training was required for professional librarianship, and no one had ever suggested it to me as an option. I realized my experience must have been all too common after I began my Master's program in Library and Information Science at The Catholic University of America in January 1992. I discovered that I was one of only a handful of students in the program with a science background, which ultimately

worked to my advantage. There are many sci-tech libraries around the country, and most seem to prefer or require education or experience in the sci-tech realm.

Shortly after beginning library school, I obtained a graduate assistantship at the USDA National Agricultural Library's Biotechnology Information Center. There, I gained invaluable experience providing reference and referral services to a diverse clientele made up of government and business representatives, academics, students, and members of the general public. I also developed and performed numerous online searches of NAL's AGRICOLA database to produce published bibliographies on a variety of biotechnology topics. In addition, I was responsible for collection development, vertical file maintenance, and training new graduate assistants. My science education served me well as I set about learning the language and concepts of agricultural biotechnology. That knowledge base enhanced my ability to designing effective database search strategies and provide coherent, useful information in response to individual client needs. As part of my library science degree, I completed the Special Libraries management course and two online database searching courses, in preparation for a full-time professional position in a special library.

After receiving my MSLS, I took a Reference Librarian position with INFOTERRA, part of the United Nations Environment Programme information network, located in the U.S. EPA Headquarters Library in Washington, D.C. This was another sci-tech information center contained within a large library, similar to my situation at NAL, so the transition was fairly easy to make. My position was a newly-created one, with primary responsibility for providing technical information to participants in an international pollution prevention project. I performed many online database searches in order to identify relevant EPA documents and put together topical bibliographies, and prepared customized information packets tailored to each client's needs. I welcomed the opportunity to establish my own small collection and define a *modus operandi* for my successor to follow.

My experience at EPA helped me obtain my current position as Information Specialist with a small environmental consulting firm. We support several offices within EPA, and much of our work involves either using or producing official EPA publications, so my understanding of the agency's document system and organizational structure has been valuable. As with my previous positions, both my science background and library science training serve me well here. In general, each staff member has a particular area of expertise, but our work is not necessarily defined or limited by our degrees.

My work is interesting, varied, and definitely non-traditional. I maintain

a small, uncataloged reference collection, but our company does not have a library. My clientele consists of my fellow staff members and our EPA clients. Everyone, including myself, manages multiple work assignments, and is responsible for writing a work plan, developing a budget, and tracking work progress for each project. Although specific to libraries, what I gleaned from my Special Libraries management course helped me in this area of planning and budgeting. I regularly search technical, business and news databases as well as the Internet, and manage document delivery in support of various research projects.

My responsibilities include producing a bi-weekly technical information report on innovative hazardous waste remediation technologies. This involves maintaining alerts in multiple databases, reviewing search results for relevance, editing, re-formatting and organizing records into pre-defined categories, and formatting a final document. One of my first projects was a comprehensive bibliography of EPA publications on innovative remediation technologies. Working on this document required me to learn how to use a graphics program, so I now have yet another new skill at my disposal! Recently, I produced a report on North American sites available for testing these types of technologies. This involved developing a questionnaire for each site, making appropriate contacts, and subsequently summarizing and organizing the information into a coherent document, which will soon be released as a new EPA publication. I am proud to be the primary author and designer of an official government document, and no

doubt will be asked to do more in the future. Another area of responsibility for our company is provision of meeting support. One aspect of this involves attending conferences to take notes, and then writing up the minutes. I enjoy doing this from time to time for the opportunity to travel to interesting places, and because I like to write and am confident in my ability to comprehend technical discussions and report on them effectively. My library science training in organization of information helps me in this endeavor, I believe.

Overall, I am pleased to have found a position in which I can take advantage of my science background and utilize my skills in obtaining, interpreting, and organizing information in ways different from the traditional librarian. I confess I

have never enjoyed cataloging, for instance, and, though I recognize it as a valuable skill, prefer not to have to do it. I also appreciate the varied nature of my work. I am rarely bored, almost always busy, and I never know exactly what I will be called upon to do next. Being a non-traditional "librarian" has its advantages!

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1) Mount, Ellis, ed. *Opening new doors; alternative careers for librarians*. Washington, DC; Special Libraries Association; 1993.

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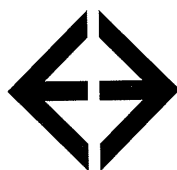
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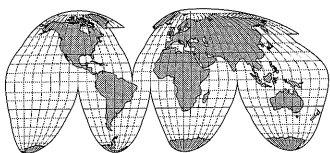
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